

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ARA-16 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /117 W

----- 013475

R 191738Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7651

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 6862

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: REORGANIZATION OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY

1. NEWLY-APPOINTED INTERIOR MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC HAS ANNOUNCED CHANGES IN MINISTRY WHICH DEEMPHASIZE ITS POLICE FUNCTION. POLICE DIRECTOR GENERAL LENOIR HAS BEEN REPLACED BY LOUIS VERGER, A MAN WITHOUT PREVIOUS POLICE EXPERIENCE. CHIRAC HAS RAISED MINISTRY ELEMENTS RESPONSIBLE FOR TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION AND RELATIONS WITH LOCALLY-ELECTED OFFICIALS TO RANK EQUALLY WITH POLICE.

2. MAIN REASON FOR SHAKEUP STEMS FROM CHIRAC'S WISH TO PROVIDE A NEW, LESS REPRESSIVE IMAGE TO COUNTER THAT OF MARCELLIN, POPULARLY CALLED "SUPER FLIC". MUCH RECENT POPULAR CRITICISM OF INTERIOR MINISTRY RESULTED FROM MARCELLIN'S EMPHASIS ON MAINTAINING PUBLIC ORDER AT EXPENSE OF "COP ON THE BEAT." REPLACING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF POLICE SHOULD GIVE
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IMPRESSION OF A CHNAGE OF EMPHASIS. CHIRAC MUST ALSO

DESIRE TO AVOID RECURRENCE OF AFFAIRS SUCH AS CANARD ENCHAINE BUGGING.

3. THERE IS AN ELECTORAL ASPECT TO THE SHIFT IN PRIORITIES WITHIN MINISTRY. ENCOURAGING LOCALLY ELECTED OFFICIALS TO HAVE PRIVILEGED ACCESS TO THE MINISTER CAN BE EXPECTED TO ENHANCE THEIR SENSE OF OBLIGATION TOWARD HIM. DESPITE THE SUPPOSEDLY APOLITICAL NATURE OF THE PREFECTURAL CORPS AND MINISTRY ITSELF, IT IS KNOWN THAT GOVERNING PARTIES USE MINISTERIAL FACILITIES AT ELECTION TIME. FOR EXAMPLE, THE REPORTS AND ELECTORAL PREDICTIONS OF THE RENSEIGNEMENTS GENERAUX, THE POLITICAL POLICE, PLAY A ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY OF MAJORITY PARTIES. SIMILARLY, THERE ARE CHARGES OF ELECTORAL FRAUD AND POLICE INTIMIDATION AT EACH ELECTION. THESE CERTAINLY EXIST, THOUGH TO A FAR LESSER DEGREE THAN CHARGED.

4. COMMENT. CHIRAC CERTAINLY HOPES TO APPEAR MORE CONCERNED OVER PRESERVING CIVIL RIGHTS AND PRIVACY OF FRENCH CITIZENS THAN WAS HIS PREDECESSOR. WE THINK IT UNLIKELY, NEVERTHELESS, THAT MUCH WILL CHANGE, ALTHOUGH THE EXUBERANCE OF THE CRS (RIOT POLICE) AND THE DST (COUNTER ESPIONAGE) MAY BE SOMEWHAT RESTRAINED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES, REORGANIZATIONS, POLICE POWERS, ELECTION FRAUD
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 MAR 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974PARIS06862
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740057-1036
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740332/aaaabeda.tel
Line Count: 87
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 APR 2002 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <31 JAN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REORGANIZATION OF THE INTERIOR MINISTRY
TAGS: PGOV, FR
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005